

United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Montana State Office

5001 Southgate Drive

Billings, Montana 59101-4669

<http://www.mt.blm.gov/>

In Reply To:

1400-300 (933.DF) P

March 15, 2006

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Instruction Memorandum No. MT-2006-055

Expires: 09/30/07

To: All Montana/Dakotas Employees

From: State Director

Subject: Montana/Dakotas Interview and Selection Policy

Program Area: Interviewing and Selection

Purpose: This memorandum updates the Montana/Dakotas policy for interviewing candidates and making selections for permanent, career seasonal, long-term temporary, and TERM positions.

Policy/Action: The attachment outlines the policy and procedures to be followed. Most significantly, it is recommended that supervisors, at a minimum, interview all candidates on the list where the final selection will most likely be made. Additionally, supervisors should be aware of the requirement (see page 5, No. 6 of Attachment 1) to submit a DI-2005, Personnel Identity Verification Request form, with Part A Sponsor completed.

Timeframe: This policy is effective immediately.

Budget Impact: None.

Background: The Montana/Dakotas Interview and Selection policy has been updated to reflect current Bureau policy, as well as to clarify the process for selection approval. Additionally, at the request of the State Management Team, a list of available interview questions has been developed and is included. Also included is a set of questions that may be utilized when conducting reference checks. It is recommended that five to eight of the listed questions be used during the interview.

Manual/Handbook Sections Affected: None.

Coordination: IM was coordinated with the Montana/Dakotas Administrative Officers and the Deputy State Director, Division of Support Services.

Contact: Human Resources Office Staffing Specialists, 406-896-5002.

Signed by: Chun Wong, Acting

Authenticated by: Jean Schaak (MT-933)

3 Attachments

1-Interview and Selection Policy (6 pp)

2-Sample Interview Questions (6 pp)

3-Sample Reference Check Questions (1 p)

MONTANA/DAKOTAS
INTERVIEW AND SELECTION POLICY

March, 2006

Current Bureau policy, which is outlined in BLM Manual 1400-335, Merit Promotion Plan, is as follows:

A. Selecting officials will ensure that all referred applicants are treated fairly and equitably. The selecting official is responsible for ensuring that interviews are properly conducted, that all questions are job-related, and that every effort is made to obtain the same information from each candidate. Interview panels may be used at the discretion of the selecting official.

B. Interviewers may not ask about or discuss a candidate's race or ethnic background, color, sex, age, disability, religious beliefs, marital or family status, political affiliation, sexual orientation, or labor organization affiliation or activity.

C. Normally, if one candidate is interviewed, all other candidates must be interviewed. However, if only certain candidates are chosen to be interviewed, the choice must be based on job-related criteria and documented in the vacancy announcement file.

While the Bureau policy allows only interviewing certain candidates, it is recommended that supervisors, at a minimum, interview all candidates on the list where the final selection will most likely be made. This could be from a Merit Promotion (MP) or a Delegated Examining Unit (DEU) list. In cases of an exception to this recommendation, the supervisor must provide the following to the HR Office:

- The title, series, and grade of the position;
- The supervisor's reasons for requesting the exception, which must be based on job-related criteria;
- For Field Office positions, concurrence by the Field Manager; for State Office positions, concurrence by the Deputy State Director or Associate State Director. Concurrence can be in the form of a signature or an email to the Staffing Specialist.
- Upon receipt, this documentation will be included in the vacancy announcement file.

Selecting Officials must make selection decisions based on legitimate reasons that are supportable. As you go through the interview and selection process, ensure the person selected is the best qualified candidate and retain documentation to support your decision.

In an effort to assist you in conducting interviews and processing selections for positions, the following is provided:

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

1. Once the Vacancy Announcement(s) closes, the Branch of Human Resources Management will access the automated Hiring Management system (formerly known as Quickhire). The automated system will evaluate each applicant based upon their individual responses to the questions included in the vacancy announcement. The HR Specialist will review the qualification determinations made by the automated system and verify that the applicant's resume supports their responses to the questions in the vacancy announcement. If necessary, scores assigned by the automated system may be adjusted. Upon completion of the rating/ranking process, candidates are electronically referred to the Selecting Official (SO) for consideration. Supervisors are to be reminded that information related to the vacancy announcement (who applied, who was referred, who is being interviewed, etc.) is confidential and should not be discussed with others.
2. Upon receipt of the Candidate Referral Roster (for merit promotion vacancy announcements) and the Certificate of Eligibles (for delegated examining authority announcements), the SO makes the decision to personally conduct interviews or to establish a team to conduct the initial interviews. If the decision is made to use an interview team, the SO may identify several individuals (usually 3, but the number is up to the SO) to serve on the interview team. The interview team must contain at least one subject matter expert (SME). Other members of the interview team can be BLM employees, Federal employees from outside the agency, as well as individuals from outside the Federal Government. The purpose of the interview team is to conduct an interview with each referred candidate and to make recommendations to the SO of the top candidates (usually 3 to 5, but the number is up to the SO) for the position being filled.
3. Interview team members must be completely familiar with the specific requirements of the position being filled, and understand the interview process and procedures. The SO is responsible for briefing the interview team on the interview process and to communicate his/her expectations of the process. The Human Resources Specialist responsible for staffing the position will also be available to assist in briefing the interview team. When interviewing for Law Enforcement positions, the Special-Agent-in-Charge (SAC), or his designated representative, must be a member of the interview panel. The SO is responsible for coordinating involvement of the SAC.
4. A list of the interview questions which highlight the expectations of the position will be prepared by the SO or the members of the interview team. Interview questions should avoid addressing basic qualifications; those items have already been reviewed by Human Resources. Attachment 2 includes a listing of potential interview questions for your use.

Additionally, avoid questions requiring only a "yes" or "no" answer. Concentrate questions around the applicant's work and educational background, work habits, and leadership competencies, working as a team member, personal strengths and weaknesses, decision-making abilities, etc.

Interviewers should not identify hiring standards that are not job-related. The interview is not valid if the standards automatically screen out applicants whose speech, dress, hair length, social status, ethnic background, or personal lifestyle differs from the interviewer. Beware of tendencies toward stereotypical thinking. The principle of non-discrimination requires that individuals be considered on the basis of individual qualifications, skills, and experience.

5. The same questions must be asked of each candidate. Often, the response to one question will lead to another, which is a natural part of the interview process. These secondary questions do not have to be repeated to all candidates. Some interviewers provide the list of questions to candidates in advance of the interview to allow preparation time. This approach is optional.
6. Conduct the interviews with as much privacy as possible, usually in a private office or small conference room. Schedule an appointment with the applicant, taking into account the best time to call and/or conduct the interview at the applicant's convenience.
7. Candidates may be interviewed either in person or over the telephone. It is recommended that interviews, to the extent practical, be conducted in person. If some candidates are not located within the local commuting area, interviews should be conducted by telephone. As long as all candidates are asked the same questions, there is nothing wrong with interviewing some candidates in person and others over the telephone. In some cases, a candidate will ask for a personal interview. If this occurs, the candidate is responsible for any expense associated with traveling for the interview.

However, if an SO makes a decision to interview a candidate in person who lives in another location, the SO is responsible for expenses associated with either traveling to meet the candidate or for bringing the candidate in for an interview.

8. Be advised that with the use of the automated Hiring Management system, the interview step has become significantly more important. Why? The automated system provides the applicant little opportunity to provide information about themselves. The amount of space for the resume is limited, and the responses to Knowledges, Skills, and Abilities have been replaced with job-specific questions established for the particular vacancy. As a result, supervisors must take advantage of the interview process to help ensure the person they are selecting is the right person for the job. Additionally, as the supervisor, you may choose questions for the vacancy announcement that are "short or long answer" questions. Please be advised that the short or long answer questions are not scored and considered as part of the automated rating process because the computer has no way of scoring the narrative. However, this supplemental information is valuable and should be considered as you interview and review each applicant's submission.

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW/CHECKING REFERENCES

1. At a minimum, interviews should be conducted with all applicants on the list where a selection is likely to be made. If you are unable to contact an applicant (after 3 documented attempts), or an applicant withdraws, annotate the list and forego the interview.
2. Introduce yourself or the interview team to the candidate. Give the candidate a brief explanation of the position you are interviewing for and some general information about the city where the position is located.
3. Explain to the candidate that you have a standard set of questions and that you intend to take notes.
4. At the end of the interview, ask the applicant if he/she has any questions. Additionally, give the candidate the opportunity to add any additional information that would be useful. You may also elaborate on any items you would like to make the candidate aware of regarding the status of the position, work schedules, etc. End the interview on a positive note, and let the candidate know when and how to expect a final decision on the selection.
5. The SO and/or interview team are encouraged to contact references and/or current supervisors for each applicant who has been interviewed. However, in most cases, the SO only contacts the references of the top candidates referred by the interview team. This is an acceptable practice. The same questions should be asked of each reference, and should relate to the applicant's duties, quality of performance, and work habits. A sample contact sheet for checking references is included as Attachment 3.

MAKING A SELECTION

1. When referring the top candidates to the SO, interview teams should consider all relevant information including experience, education/training, awards, supervisory appraisals, references, and notes from the interview. Remember that this process is confidential, and should not be communicated to anyone other than the SO.
2. Additional interviews by the SO are recommended prior to final selection but are not required. The SO has the option to conduct further interviews of any or all of the candidates or to make a final selection from the recommendations of the interview team. The SO has the option of selecting any candidate referred for the position even if that individual is not one of the top candidates recommended by the interview team; however, the SO must be able to justify how the selectee is the most qualified candidate for the position.

3. Once a tentative selection is made, the SO should prepare a justification which documents why the person selected is the best person for the position. The justification should include the following information:
 - Summary of Outreach conducted (reference the Individual Recruitment Plan if the outreach strategy outlined in this plan was followed) or summarize what outreach was conducted.
 - Method of recruitment.
 - Process utilized to interview candidates; indicate those candidates who were not interviewed and why.
 - Describe why the candidate is the best candidate for the position. Focus on specific qualifications and/or experience that make this candidate the best.
4. The SO must obtain concurrence, including the selection justification, through their immediate Supervisor, to the Deputy State Director, or Field Manager for your Budget Unit. This individual is responsible for reviewing the selection and ensuring that the best qualified candidate is selected. For supervisory positions, at any grade level, the Field Manager or Deputy State Director must verbally contact the Associate State Director to discuss.
5. The SO then submits the package (include the justification for selection with the Deputy State Director or Field Manager concurrence, the Candidate Referral Roster and/or Certificate of Eligibles), along with all original applications to the Human Resources Specialist responsible for the position (the HR Specialist will be identified on the Candidate Referral Roster or Certificate of Eligibles) in the Branch of Human Resources Management. Upon receipt of the package, the Branch of Human Resources Management will review the selection.
6. In order to be in compliance with the Homeland Security Presidential Directive, HSPD-12, include the DI-2005 with your package, Personal Identification Verification (PIV) Credential form, with Section A, Sponsor/COR - PIV Request completed.
7. Do not make an offer of employment until the Human Resources Office notifies you that your selection has been authorized.

FOLLOWING SELECTION

SOs are encouraged to contact all candidates referred and inform them who was selected. You may also use this opportunity to discuss suggestions for improvement, areas of experience where a candidate was lacking, etc.

The Human Resources Office will notify all referred candidates for the position, via email, within two (2) days of the selection approval of the candidate selected.

Contacts:

Tracy Thoricht, 406-896-5224
Janell Bond, 406-896-5232
Joli Pavelis, 406-896-5240
Katherine Ilari, 406-896-5230
Diane Friez, 406-896-5265

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell us about a specific situation where your success depended on your ability to get others (public and staff) to follow your guidance and/or instruction.
2. Why do you want to be a manager/supervisor?
3. What qualities do you think make a good supervisor?
4. Describe your experience in dealing with personnel (conduct and performance) issues.
5. What do you feel are the most important duties of a Manager?
6. Describe your experience in dealing with elected officials at the county, state, and federal levels, as well as the media.
7. Tell us about a specific situation where your success depended on your ability to get others to follow you when you were dealing with multiple customers and uncertainties, and you needed the commitment of people to make something work.
8. Tell us about a situation when you needed commitment to complete something, and it did not meet your expectations. How did you react?
9. Tell us about a specific change you were successful at adapting to in your current position.
10. Tell us about a specific time when you found it most difficult to adjust to change.
11. Tell us about a time when you were frustrated trying to satisfy an internal customer where deadlines were tight and people had to work extra hard to deliver.
12. How would you motivate your employees to "get on the bandwagon" when working on a project?
13. Tell us about a time when it was the most difficult to work as a member of a group or team.
14. Tell us about a time when you worked with a group that was particularly successful in completing a project or assignment.
15. Tell us about a time it was the most difficult to communicate successfully as a member of a group or team.
16. How would you approach and resolve a significant personality conflict between members of your staff?
17. How would you approach and resolve a significant personality conflict between a member of your staff and a member of another staff?

18. What are the top 2 strengths you would bring to the position? What things would you like to improve?
19. Describe your management style.
20. How would you handle disciplinary actions and/or performance problems?
21. What is your philosophy in developing employees for career advancement? Do you have an example?
22. What do you feel are the most important duties of this position?
23. What qualities do you think make a good supervisor and a bad supervisor?
24. What attributes can you "add" to make our office a better place to work?
25. Tell us about a time when you felt your communication ability was particularly successful in completing a project or assignment.
26. Why do you want to work for the BLM?
27. What strengths can you bring to the field office?
28. As a supervisor, describe the kind of management style you would use. How would you handle disciplinary actions?
29. How would you handle the employee performance evaluation process? What level of employee participation do you think is appropriate?
30. I'm looking for a leader who can show me how to get things accomplished, not why we can't (red tape). How would you ensure a "can do" attitude in an office you manage?
31. With a limited budget, how would you decide who gets to go to training in your office?
32. What would you do to maintain or increase unity/team spirit and efficiency within your office?
33. How would you approach and resolve a significant resource issue which impacts your office? (networking, synergizing, brainstorming)?
34. Why are you interested in this job?
35. Forestry and fuels management are the largest programs that you'll be responsible for. What's your understanding of these programs?
36. What, if any, experience have you had working on Landscape or Watershed Assessments?
37. The EPAP (performance plan) for this position lists supervision and budget oversight for our renewable resource program as the two critical performance measures. What do you feel would be your strengths and weaknesses related to those measures?

38. Out of the various positions you've held, which one is/was your favorite? Why?
39. Do you have a "preferred" method of decision making?
40. If you're selected for this position, how would you like to spend the first month on the job?
41. How would you characterize an employee with a good work ethic?
42. Describe what the term "multiple use" means to you and how you would explain this in a public forum.
43. Describe your experience and ability to work with a wide variety of partners and cooperators to accomplish projects.
44. Describe your management/supervisory style. Specifically, address how you will motivate staff and set work priorities.
45. Describe your qualities/characteristics that will benefit our management team.
46. Why would you want to move to _____?
47. What are you most passionate about in your career?
48. What do you consider to be your most important career accomplishments?
49. What do you see as the challenges facing the public lands for the next 5-10 years?
50. How would you deal with an internal team conflict where things are heated?
51. In a multiple use agency, wildlife is often viewed as a roadblock. How would you promote conservation and work with managers and other program staff to turn that perception around?
52. We are currently working on a Sage Grouse Management Plan for MT. The actions outlined in the plan are intended to have a positive effect on sage grouse and to prevent the species from being listed under the endangered species act. What role do you feel that the BLM should play in sage grouse recovery and how would you implement that role?
53. What experience do you have with initiating and maintaining partnerships? Using these partnerships to acquire funding through Challenge Cost Shares?
54. What are the strengths and weaknesses you have experienced using an interdisciplinary approach?
55. What would you like to accomplish as (position title)?
56. What kind of supervisor brings out the best in your performance?
57. How do you approach conflict?

58. What experience do you have in dealing with the media, elected officials, and stakeholders on controversial issues?
59. What might you do to maintain or increase unity/team spirit and efficiency within the management team and within the office in general?
60. Describe your experience in directing budget development and tracking performance.
61. How would you handle the situation if you felt your viewpoints were not being considered by your supervisor?
62. Regarding personnel issues such as conduct and performance, grievances, and EEO complaints, you may have to lead delicate discussions between or among staff members. How would you rate your ability to handle such discussions tactfully and to lead the discussions to a suitable conclusion?
63. How does your experience relate to this position, in particular?
64. What are, or were, the most rewarding aspects of your most recent job?
65. What would your ideal job be like?
66. If you had unlimited time and financial resources, what would you do?
67. After learning more about this job, which aspects interest you most?
68. In what aspects of this job do you feel most confident?
69. In your last job, how did the realities you experienced differ from your initial expectations?
70. What concerns you most about performing this job?
71. Which of your skills do you think is most relevant to this job?
72. What situations excite and motivate you?
73. What type of management style do you think is the most effective?
74. Have you patterned your own management style after someone in particular?
75. Describe a leader you admire.
76. Describe a time when you have used a problem-solving process to obtain successful results.
77. What personal characteristics do you think add to your overall effectiveness?
78. How do you measure the success of your work?
79. Have you ever resolved a long-standing problem?

80. Describe a time you had to make an unpopular decision.
81. Describe a time when there was no rule or precedent to help you attack a problem.
82. What is the most innovative project you have ever worked on?
83. Give me proof of your persuasiveness.
84. Describe a time when you had to alter your leadership style.
85. Give an example of how you saw a project through, despite various obstacles.
86. Tell me about a time when you showed real diligence or perseverance.
87. Tell me about a time when your diplomacy skills were really put to the test.
88. Tell me about an accomplishment you had a difficult time achieving.
89. Where do you hope that your career will have progressed to in the next few years?
90. What makes you think that this job is right for you at this point in your career?
91. Have you ever found yourself really burned out from a job, and if so, what did you do about it?
92. Describe two or three aspects of your last job that you never want to repeat.
93. What do you find to be the most rewarding, and the most frustrating, aspects of managing people?
94. How do you establish yourself when you are assuming a new management position?
95. In your experience, what type of organization is most effective in driving improvements and allowing you to manage effectively?
96. Is there anything else we should know about you, as an applicant? Do you have anything to add?
97. What do you find most attractive about the job for which you are interviewing? What do you find least attractive?
98. What do you consider to be your work-related strengths and weaknesses?
99. What adjectives would you use to describe your relationships with your coworkers in your present/previous position? What adjectives would you use to describe your relationships with subordinates? Explain.

100. Describe a situation in which your work was criticized and how you handled this situation?
101. What is your concept of an ideal work environment?
102. How do you manage pressure or deadlines?
103. Do you prefer working alone or in groups? Can you give me examples of situations like these that you liked or didn't like?
104. What are some things you would like to avoid in a job? Why?
105. What kind of pressures have you encountered in your previous work experiences, and how have you dealt with the pressures?
106. How would you define the job for which you are interviewing?
107. What do you see as the most difficult task involved in the position for which you are interviewing?
108. What do/did you like best about your present/previous position? What do/did you like least?

Reference Contacts

Position Title, Series, Grade: _____

Applicant: _____

Date: _____

1. What is/was your association with the applicant?
2. What were the applicant's principle duties and responsibilities?
3. How well does this person get along with co-workers?
4. Describe the applicant's oral and written communication skills?
5. Describe what the applicant is like to supervise? What are his/her strengths?
-dependable, reliable, trustworthy, organized, ethical
6. Describe the applicant's analytical skills?
7. Describe the applicant's ability to work independently, as well as a member of a team?
8. Describe the applicant's work habits?
9. Part of this job is to_____.
How do you think this applicant will handle this program?
10. Would you rehire this candidate if you had a vacancy in your organization?
11. Is there anything else I should know about?

Interviewer: _____
Name

Date